



Letters

Arms Control

Nigel Hawkes (20 Oct. 1972, p. 286) articulates how hard it is to sustain a high level of morale in working for international conciliation and disarmament. He also gives due credit to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) for its indispensable reportorial work in documenting the world's preoccupation with armaments.

It is, however, a mistake to judge SALT (Strategic Arms Limitations Talks) and other diplomatic efforts solely by their failure to reduce the global expenditure on arms. Many elements of the arms account, for example, the rapidly changing strategic power of China and its geopolitical impact, were simply beyond the reach of SALT. Dramatic political reorientations in other spheres have now transformed the context of efforts at arms control.

If strategic disarmament were an end in itself, the scene today would be the most discouraging in history. Expenditures on arms remain a vicious drain on resources needed for economic development. However, the overriding peril of strategic weapons is not that they will be stockpiled, but that they may be used. Most of us would agree that we are safer today in that respect than we were 10 or 15 years ago. SALT has contributed a measure of stability through its formal arrangements of mutual limitation. Perhaps more impor-

tant, the dialogue has reduced one of the gravest threats—thermonuclear war founded on miscalculation.

SALT has disseminated a far more sophisticated understanding of what each side must do to protect its own security in the face of others' efforts at self-defense. The banning of nationwide missile defenses (ABM) implies the acceptance of mutual deterrence as national policy by the United States and the Soviet Union and has been an important and necessary first step toward the vital goal of stopping the arms race. This is far from the "hoax" claimed by SIPRI director Frank Barnaby, for it makes the MIRV (Multiple Independently Targetable Reentry Vehicle) race far less significant—and one that can hopefully also be constrained when SALT II gets down to the very difficult task of qualitative constraints. Besides reducing the threat of strategic war, this atmosphere of mutual problem-solving—unless disturbed by other major political confrontations—can for the first time lead to rational schemes of mutual arms reductions that leave national securities unimpaired.

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